DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 831 CG 014 428

AUTHOR Yager, Geoffrey G.
TITLE Interinstitutional Research in Counselor Training: An Experiential Model.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 7-11, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperative Programs; Counselor Educators; *Counselor Training; *Experiential Learning; *Institutional Cooperation; Interpersonal Relationship; *Interprofessional Relationship; Models; Researchers; *Research Methodology; Teamwork

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the value of collaborative research models in counselor training research. The focus is on a model that encourages interinstitutional collaborative research efforts, in which colleagues are brought together without a detailed purpose to generate and share research ideas. Several fundamental components of an effective experiential research team include: (1) researchers with a sufficiently similar point of view; (2) members with a variety of established skills; (3) a specified task to be accomplished; (4) a team of 4-10 members; (5) members with a commitment to the research effort and the ability to practice self-control; and (6) well-planned team research meetings. A discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the model concludes the paper. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED186831

Interinstitutional Research in Counselor Training:

An Experiential Model

Geoffrey G. Yager

University of Cincinnati

Presented at the Annual

Meeting of the American Educational

Research Association

April, 1980

CG014428

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Geoffrey G. Yager

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Interinstitutional Research in Counselor Training:

An Experiential Model

As counselor trainers, we often find ourselves attempting to summarize and simplify the counseling research results for our students. To communicate the complexities of even one research study to a class of beginning masters' students would typically be an inappropriate expenditure of time and energy. One of the unintended byproducts of this attempt at parsimony is that our students, and occasionally we ourselves, may come to believe that scientific contributions to counseling are the creations of singular minds. Rogers, Wolpe, Ellis, Super, Holland, and Roe are often perceived as individuals who work alone.

As Gallagher and Sanders (1976) have stated:

> The more accurate model of science is a growing pyramid of knowledge. A new fact is built upon old facts; a testable theory rests on proven theories. Each scientist is able to lay a few stones on top of those that have been laid by past generations. Once in a great while, some scientist sees the pyramid creatively, rearranges the stones or the relationship between facts, and gives us an insight we did not have before. "If I see further than others, " Sir Isaac Newton wrote, "it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants." It is through the gradual accumulation of information and the growing complexity of theories that science progresses. (pp. 1-2)

The point to be made, of course, is that scientific research to a very large extent must be a cooperative and accumulative effort. I have often found this awareness remarkably lacking in my doctoral students in counseling. Typically, the doctoral students will enter their advanced program with the idea that their dissertation must involve an

investigation of something totally new and unrelated to existing research efforts. This misperception is reflected in the familiar tale of the hard working chemistry major who slaved three years on a complex chemical reaction only to find out the week before the defense of the dissertation that someone else had reported the same reaction. According to the story, this dejected student (a) committed suicide, (b) resolutely started all over again, or (c) sought out a good counselor for long term therapy. The hidden messages in this tale are threefold: (a) all research must be totally unique, (b) the individual researcher works alone, and (c) it is best to guard your research ideas and keep things secret.

I would not argue that my doctoral students should all do joint dissertations. I do, however, strongly encourage collaborative efforts to generate their individual dissertation ideas. Also, I require a careful "collaborative relationship" with the existing research literature. My students' research ideas need to be solidly based upon what people have found in the past. Borrowing an analogy from Platt (1964), I ask my students to regard their dissertation as the next small branch on a "tree of research."

Although not exclusively so, the research literature in education and in counseling training reflects some commonalities with the thinking of my doctoral students. Arlin (1977) found that published educational researchers averaged about 1.85 total publications between 1969 and 1976. Of all of those who had published, about 60% were one-publication authors. Additionally, Arlin(1977) presented evidence to suggest that the

contributions of one-publication authors have a lower impact and, perhaps, a lower quality. Although no attempt was made in Arlin's study to identify if multiple authors were building upon earlier work in subsequent publications, this might be a reasonable hypothesis.

More directly related to the counseling literature, Goldman (1976) has indicated his discomfort with the existing counseling research:

> My thesis is that the majority of published research in our field has little or nothing to offer to practitioners. Only a tiny portion of all the research in all the journals and monographs and books has anything to say to counselors in schools, colleges, and agencies; indeed, much of it has no discernable value for anyone. (p. 543)

Among Goldman's criticisms is the general absence of replication studies. Most studies include individuals from only one sample at one specific location. Without replication or, at minimum, a careful delineation of the sample participants, a research consumer has no idea if the described findings may be generalizable.

As one final substantiation for the need for accumulative efforts in scientific investigation, Schutz (1977) argued the value of journal articles that report two or three coordinated studies rather than one isolated experiment. There is, as we might anticipate, considerable heuristic value in having the questions naturally arising from one study immediately dealt with and reported in a second or third study.

In summary, several sources have called for increased attention to coordinated, on-going, and systematic research. Although such research might be accomplished by one dynamic scholar <u>with</u> his or her colleagues and graduate students, the likely costs of necessary replications of

findings (in different settings with alternative samples) could prove prohibitive. For this reason and for the reason of possible increased quality of research, I am encouraging an interinstitutional approach to collaborative research.

Interinstitutional Research

Following the suggestions of Petrie (1976), I distinguish between interinstitutional and multi-institutional research efforts. Essentially, a multi-institutional research approach would only ask that all members of the group "do their own thing" at the same time. Such research would require very minor integrating and organizing of efforts. An example of such an approach would be a special issue of a professional journal on a given topic. The editor would, perhaps, need to piece together the various contributions with some appropriate commentary, but each contributor would be primarily working on his or her own.

Interinstitutional efforts at research, however, require more integration, more modification, and more stimulation of the team members' ideas as the research is created, carried out, and completed. There is a joint expenditure of effort and a mutually-determined outcome of the research. The investigators work together and interdependently: "participants need to take into account the contributions of their colleagues to make their own contributions" (Petrie, 1976, p. 9).

Over the past ten years, I have seen a relatively small number of successful interinstitutional research efforts within counselor training. Most commonly, when papers are presented or published involving joint

authors from separate institutions, the authors are tied by "academic parentage" (advisor/advisee) or by an earlier institutional "sibling" linkage (former colleagues at the same university). These "academically incestual" relationships have provided some of the most significant contributions to counseling and counselor training. The contributions of this type of collaboration far exceed expectations based only on the numbers of such joint efforts. As long as there are doctoral programs in counseling, these relationships will exist and should be encouraged.

What I wish to address in this paper are interinstitutional research efforts beyond our immediate academic lineage. Such relationships may well expand our own set methods of approaching research and may hopefully lead to more rapid and more meaningful development of the science of counseling.

The Experiential Model

One rather extreme model for promoting research across institutions is the "experiential" model of collaboration. Before I describe this approach, it must be stressed that in designing an extreme model, I am providing a benchmark for discussion and not an immediately workable model.

The experiential approach to interinstitutional research in counselor training would draw researchers together, at least initially, by personal and colleagial ties. Graduate school colleagues, present institutional colleagues, acquaintances from professional organization activities, and friends of friends might be brought together to discuss

"issues of relevance to counselor training research." Obviously, a specific product or goal for the research is not specified prior to the initial contact among the collaborators. Other than the common interest in "doing something" research related, this first meeting is very much like a convention bull session at the bar (minus the alcohol).

The types of shared resources, whether physical, personal, or informational, are allowed to develop out of the experience of the contact between researchers. As counselor educators, we have much to share with one another, and different groups will have unique needs just as specific individuals will have singular contributions. For example, one member of a research team may have access to certain sophisticated videotaping facilities, another may have considerable statistical knowledge, and a third may have certain informational resources available. Although each of the three certainly possesses many additional resources, the combination of the three unique contributions will likely create a significantly more positive potential for research accomplishments than will each individual working alone.

The goals of an experiential approach to counselor training research are, as might be anticipated, primarily experiential. The group members are participating because there is something to be gained in seeing and talking with other professionals. Commonality of experience and either similarities or differences in perceptions of counseling practice may lead to the development of new research ideas. Long-term

research goals may or may not eventually be established. The personal contact and exploration of ideas are the primary rewards for participation. Concrete research following directly from the collaboration is a potential, but slightly less likely, reward.

In sum, an experiential research approach is characterized by a congenial group of colleagues, who in a relatively unstructured manner, discuss their perspectives on important research issues of the day.

Fundamental Components of the Effective Research Team

Although the experiential approach described above is only one model of collaborative research, it must (as must any such joint effort) incorporate certain elements for effective operation.

1. The team of researchers must have a sufficiently similar point of view that they can effectively communicate with one another. Although widely diverse orientations (e.g., theoretical orientations to counseling) may exist in the team, a common perspective of research and its potential value to the field of investigation is required. As work continues, a common "language" is developed and an atmosphere of intellectual security and trust is created and maintained.

2. The team must consist of members with a variety of established skills. Interinstitutional research is often regarded in much the same manner as Petrie (1976) described interdisciplinary projects:

> All too often grandly conceived interdisciplinary project never get off the ground, and the level of scholarship seldom exceeds that of a glorified bull-session. Frequently, and with some justification, people look upon interdisciplinary projects as a dumping ground for the less than disciplinary competent. (p. 9)

Working with a group on research is not the equivalent of admitting failure as an individual researcher! I would argue that successful collaborative research requires the most competent scientists. Furthermore, the most competent scientists are the most effective collaborators. Unlike an interdisciplinary approach, we seek not experts from various disciplines but a variety of individuals with subexpertise within the disciplines of education and psychology.

3. The team must specify the task it is attempting to accomplish. This task may be very specific (e.g., "to replicate Study X in five different settings"), or it may be rather amorphous (e.g., "to stimulate ideas and communicate findings"). As the reader will note, the latter, relatively open task is characteristic of the experiential model of collaboration. In either case, however, the important factor is that the task is at least implicitly agreed to by all researchers involved.

4. The team should consist of between four and ten members. Four is a lower limit for two reasons: (a) the presence of four people ensures the needed verbal interchange and stimulation, and (b) with four people, it allows for two individuals at each of two campuses--a team member on one's own campus increases the likelihood of continued efforts on the project. Ten people becomes a maximum because larger groups introduce far too much random "noise" into the system.

5. Members of the team must have a significant commitment to the research effort and and ability to practice self-control. The methodology of self-management might well be an appropriate initial assignment for research team members. (This comment is directly generated

from my own attempts at interinstitutional collaboration in research. Although my intentions are always honorable, my return from a professional meeting always places me back within the unending demands of my university position. My well-intentioned collaborative commitments tend to take a back seat to the reward contingencies of people I see everyday.)

6. A team research meeting, even one of an experiential nature, should be well planned. It requires leadership and a system of reporting. As Scott (1953) has stated: "If [a conference] is worth having, it is worth having an agenda and it is worth having minutes. the minutes need not be long and very detailed, but they should report the discussions that went on, and the actions taken" (p. 96).

Strengths of Research Collaboration

There are several strengths of research collaboration. First, joint research can make a qualitative contribution by increasing the likelihood that one study will be built on another, earlier study. Second, a team approach can increase the capacity of a "brilliant" thinker. Despite the need for research competence in every member of the team, one particularly creative individual can increase the implementation of his/her ideas through the aid of the collaborative group. Third, significant monetary savings may acrue through the efficient sharing of resources. Fourth, there is a significant reduction in the lag time between the generation of research ideas and their dissemination to others (at least to others within the collaborative group). Fifth,

particularly in an experiential collaboration, there is little need for extensive administrative efforts. Finally, the high flexibility of the experiential approach would allow for eventual development of the research effort in directions which would be more structured and goal oriented. (The experiential model allows evolution in such a manner as to "outgrow" its initial lack of structure.)

Weaknesses of Research Collaboration

The inevitable "shakedown" period of any group may be perceived as a weakness of interinstitutional research collaboration. While people are getting to know and feel comfortable with one another; while they are establishing commonalities in research language and approach; or while they are developing a better picture of the potential values of collaborative efforts, it may appear that nothing is happening at all! Indeed, the inherent socializing that occurs in the experiential model may actually expand into a cocktail hour atmosphere rather than the "work-oriented" atmosphere needed for productivity. The very flexibility that allows for fluid operation also allows for no coordinated activity at all!

Summary

It is argued that counseling training research can be more effectively addressed through collaborative research models. Of particular value would be interinstitutional models that would allow for a combination of resources across institutions. One model of interinstitutional

collaboration has been labeled "experiential." In this approach, colleagues are brought together without a detailed purpose to generate and share research ideas. The convention meeting for which this paper has been written is, in fact, just such an "experiential" attempt at interinstitutional research collaboration. It is my hope that the presenters can not only accomplish the initial aims of "mutual stimulation and exchange of ideas" but that we may also move eventually to a more structured and systematic attack upon the research issues of the counseling field.

References

Arlin, M. One-study publishing typifies educational inquiry. Educational Researcher, 1977, 6(9), 11-15.

Gallagher, J. J. & Sanders, J. In advocacy of research in education. Educational Researcher, 1976, 5(2), 1-2.

Goldman, L. A revolution in counseling research. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1976, 23, 543-552.

Petrie, H. G. Do you see what I see? The epistemology of interdisciplinary inquiry. Educational Researcher, 1976, 5(2), 9-14.

Platt, J. R. Strong inference. Science, 1964, 146, 347-352.

Schutz, R. E. Increasing the significance of research articles. Educational Researcher, 1977, 6(4), 1.

Scott, E. W. Communications and teamwork. In G. P. Bush & L. H. Hattery (Eds.), Teamwork in research. Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1953.